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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "STEW SUGGESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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So many requests have come in lately for more information on meat cookery, particularly on thrifty meat dishes, that I have decided the time has come to speak of stews.

Good, dependable, nourishing, and inexpensive meat-stew -- the dish that has been a favorite with princes and paupers in almost every country on earth, the dish that has pleased the haughty and the humble alike. Many a famous foreign dish featured in fashionable restaurants is really just another variation of stew. For example, there's French ragout, and Chinese chop suey, and there's Mexican chili con carne. Almost every nation has its favorite stew.

Reduced to its simplest terms, a stew is a meat dish made by simmering small pieces of meat for a long time. Some stews like Hungarian goulash or our American brown stew of beef are simply meat and gravy with seasoning. Then other stews, like Irish meat-and-potato stew, or the chicken gumbo so popular in our southern States -- other stews are meat and vegetables cooked together. Some stews have thick gravy. Others have thin gravy. Some are highly seasoned. Others are very mild. Some have few ingredients. Others have many. But -- every good stew in the world is cooked long enough to make the meat tender. Every good stew is based on the cooking principle of making the meat tender by long slow cooking with moist heat.

The reasons that stews have been popular with so many people for as far back as history are many. First, stew is one of the most appetizing ways of preparing the less tender cuts of meat. Second, stew is a simple and easy dish to prepare if you give it enough time to cook. And, third, stew is one of the best of low-cost meat dishes. You can make a most delicious stew with very inexpensive meat and a few cents' worth of vegetables. And, finally, stew can be almost a whole meal in itself -- a one-dish meal. That means a saving of time in preparing, serving, and dishwashing.

But all stews, also, are not delicious. You've heard of the unpleasant "boarding house stew" and the stew that goes by the name of "the Saturday-night clean-up" and contains all the leavings of the week's meals. Stew can be tasteless, stew can be tough, and stew can be unattractive both in appearance and flavor. It just depends on how you make it.

What makes a successful stew? First, a good recipe -- ingredients in the right amounts. And then, careful cooking and seasoning.



To bring out the good flavor of stewing meat -- the rich brown flavor, the foods people advise first trimming the meat carefully to remove fat and gristle, then flouring the pieces, and finally browning them in fat. Do all this before you add any liquid. And then, add only enough water to cover. Too much will make your stew pale and tasteless. Many times you can develop flavor by browning the vegetables before adding them to the kettle. Celery, onion, carrots and so on will all take on a richer flavor if they are browned in fat as a first step in cooking. Another point. Put the vegetables in the kettle toward the last of the cooking -- when the meat is already tender. In that way you don't stew all the taste out of the vegetables. And you don't cook them until they are an unpleasant mush.

When the meat and vegetables are tender, then is the time to thicken the gravy of your stew. If you are making a rich brown stew, you'll add browned flour for thickening. You can brown the flour either by spreading it out in a pan in the oven or by turning it over and over in a heavy skillet on a low flame. You don't need fat in browning flour.

There, listeners, are 3 little ways of giving your stew plenty of flavor. First, brown the meat. Second, brown the vegetables. Third, brown the flour you use for thickening.

Now just 4 little don'ts about making stew. Don't try to make any stew in a minute. You can't make good stew without long slow cooking. Second, don't add too much water or other liquid. Third, don't use too much fat. And finally, don't add the vegetables until the meat has had time to cook tender.

There you have the general principles for cooking stew. But for the sake of variety, maybe we should go into the large variety of ingredients you can use in stew. You can make stew of the inexpensive cuts of every sort of meat-animal from rabbit to reindeer, from beef and veal, and lamb and mutton, to pork, fresh and cured. You can make stew of oxtail and of kidneys. For variety, you can make it of a combination of meat -- beef and ham, for example, as in beef and ham gumbo.

Then for variety in flavor you can call on any one of a score of inexpensive seasonings. Among the leaves that will add to the flavor of stew are celery tops and parsley leaves, fresh or dried, and also bay leaf, leaf savory and thyme. Onions and garlic are old favorites for seasoning stews. Tomatoes give color as well as pleasant tart flavor. And then you can use such unusual seasonings as cloves and caraway seed. I've even heard that a very little ginger or cinnamon adds a subtle and pleasant flavor. To make these seasonings successful, however, remember to use them in small amounts. And very often a blend of several gives better flavor than just one.

Finally, you can vary your stew by serving it in different ways. One day you can serve it steaming hot in a covered dish. Another day you can serve it on a hot platter surrounded with vegetables or within a ring of fluffy white boiled rice. Or you can make your stew into a meat pie by taking it with a lid or crust of biscuit dough.

